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ABSTRACT

As an alternative to the traditional public school, some educators recommend an environment rich in academic, artistic, and athletic stimuli, from which the child can take what he wants when he wants it. This survey represents the observations of visitors to classrooms in the San Francisco Bay Area which are run on the free learner principle. Twenty private schools, two experimental programs in public schools, and two public schools which are working within the framework of compulsory education are described. As a preface to the descriptions of the actual schools, a fictitious "Hill School" is described which embodies much of the philosophy and practice of the free school ideal. A table of data is also presented which gives information about the student and teacher population and financial status of each of the schools described. This document previously announced as ED 041 480. (JY)

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THE FREE LEARNER

a survey of experiments in education

conducted by

CONSTANCE WOULF

MARCH 1970

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The inspiration for this survey was a book and its author: George Leonard's Education and Ecstasy and Leonard's course given at the University of California in Summer 1969. Appreciation is also extended to the persons who visited and reported on schools.

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Introduction

Education -- is it a matter of formation from without or growth from within?

Philosophers, teachers and others have sought to define the nature and purpose of education throughout the centuries, and have lined up, explicitly or implicitly, on one side or the other. The first school of thought sees the child as a sort of tabula rasa or empty blackboard, on which must be inscribed the learning and culture of his society. The body of knowledge which the child should acquire is to be determined by the older and wiser members of the society; the task of the teacher is to transfer this knowledge to the child by the most efficient means. The other way of looking at education focuses not on the transmission of information, but on the growth and development of the individual child. The needs and interests of the student are respected by the teacher in selecting subjects of instruction. Of course, the two concepts of education are not mutually exclusive, but one stresses discipline, the other impulse. The second, carried to its logical extreme, has produced the philosophy of the free learner.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, who startled his 18th Century acquaintances by proclaiming that the child is naturally good and corrupted by society, advanced the theory of what might be called "negative education". He proposed no teaching at all until the child reached the age of reason (12 years); rather, the child should learn from those activities to which his curiosity led him.

The line of educators who placed the child at the center of all curriculum culminated late in the 19th Century in the person of John Dewey, hailed as the "father" of progressive education. Although his doctrines were distorted and misunderstood (Dewey himself repudiated much of the activity of the "progressive schools"), the basic premise was a simple one: the child's own instincts and powers should furnish the material and give the starting point for all education. The role of the teacher lay in selecting the influences to affect the child, and helping him to respond to them properly. Translated into practical terms, this might mean that a teacher might bring to class materials for making model boats, and lead the pupils into a study of transportation, economics, and geography growing from the initial activity.

This "child-centered" curriculum, however, was still within the framework of compulsory education, and the teacher still decided what he wanted the pupils to learn and arranged the environment accordingly. It remained for an Englishman, A.S. Neill, to open a school in which classes were not compulsory and students were permitted to remain away from lessons as long as they liked -- 13 years, in one extreme case. Summerhill, which opened its doors

in 1921, followed Rousseau's doctrine of the basically good child, and geared the school to meet children's interests. Often, children did not begin attending classes regularly until they were 12 years old, but then, learning freely, they were able to cover material that students in compulsory classroom situations took as long as 7 or 8 years to master.

Neill's observations about the superiority of the free learner over the student in a compulsory situation had its impact. Most educational writers today admit that it is difficult truly to teach a child anything he does not want to learn, and much has been written about ways of individualizing instruction, making use of technological advances such as programmed learning and educational television. But some writers, such as John Holt, have gone further. They claim that the traditional school system, with attendance requirements, tests, grades, and answer-centered courses, actually stifles the natural urge to learn that children are born with and use so efficiently in the pre-school years.

As an alternative to the traditional public school, Holt recommends an environment rich in academic, artistic, and athletic stimuli, from which the child can take what he wants when he wants it. Instead of the "body of knowledge" concept, Holt and others like Neill, George Leonard, and Neil Postman stress a love for learning and an ability to work creatively and joyfully -- two attributes which, they feel, will be of more value in the world these children will live in as adults.

Teachers and parents, two groups closely involved with and often frustrated by the public school system, have been intrigued by the concept of the free learner. Often the reaction is an uncertain "Well...it sounds fine, but what does a child actually do when he's not forced to attend class and carry out assignments? Without grades, how can he measure his progress and what's his incentive to do better? And how does the teacher function?"

This survey is an attempt to find the answers to some of these questions by reporting on the operation and philosophy of a number of Bay Area schools which have free learner environments. These schools were visited by one or more persons who filed reports giving factual information and subjective pictures of what the school was doing and how the children were responding. Observations and judgements, when not specifically attributed to teachers, students or printed brochures, represent the visitor's own opinion.

In addition to the 20 private schools covered in the survey, reports are also given on two experimental programs in public schools and on two public schools which are working within the framework of compulsory education to make learning an individual adventure.

Although two Montessori schools were visited and certainly qualify as free learner environments, they are not included in the survey because the Montessori method has been extensively reported and the schools visited were found not to differ appreciably from the original Casa dei Bambini established in 1907.

The fictitious "Hill School" described on the next page embodies much of the philosophy and practice of the free school. For example, the abolition of report cards and the informal teacher-student relationship apply to all the schools reported upon, even though the individual narrative reports may not specifically mention them.

A few of the schools visited were even less structured than "Hill School", with <u>all</u> initiative for lessons left to the student. Many were more structured, with students assigned to classrooms, a schedule of classes offered at specific times, or more active teacher roles. However, "Hill School" gives a quick over-all look and a partial answer to the question, "How does it work?"

"Hill School"

From the outside, Hill School looks like a comfortably-shabby home with unmistakable signs of child occupancy. Brightly-colored paintings are stuck on the windows, and "constructions" of scrap lumber and chicken wire take the place of standard playground equipment. Inside, students and teachers are winding up a weekly school meeting devoted to discussion of future field trips and a complaint from a girl about too much noise in the reading room.

After the meeting, one of the teachers drops down on a sway-backed couch ("we got it at a rummage sale") and chats about the school. "We wanted to open a place where a kid could grow in harmony with nature and his fellow man," Ken says. "Learning? Sure. Kids are naturally curious. Just give them time and freedom and they'll pick up all kinds of things." What about basics? Ken explains that the students aren't pushed to learn reading and math, but most of them pick it up, often from older students, by the time they're 8 years old. "Sometimes, when I feel a kid needs some help, I'll grab him for a work session," Ken adds.

Many of the traditional signs of school are lacking at Hill. No formal group classes are held, competition with other students is downplayed, and the teacher's role, according to Ken, is "to help kids with anything they want to learn." Instead of report cards, students get oral feedback on their progress, and parents receive yearly written evaluations.

"Look at that kid," Ken says. He points out to the back yard, where a boy swings from a tree branch. "He's been with us two months and the only thing he's done is play outdoors and occasionally drop into the woodworking shop. A pretty normal reaction of kids who come from a public school. They hated it so much that they refuse anything that even seems like learning. But give him time -- he'll come around."

What do Hill students do? A quick tour shows about six children painting in the art room, while another works with a pottery wheel, handling the material with unusual self-confidence for an 8-year-old. An older boy lies on the floor strumming a guitar and talking with a friend. A teacher is approached by a child. "Hey Sue, what about going down to the harbor to watch the ships?" In a corner, another teacher with a child curled up in her lap reads aloud from a story-book. Several children are eating their lunches, even though it's only 10 a.m.

When asked her reaction to the school, an older girl replies, "It's just great!" Looking around the house, she adds proudly, "You know, this is the first permanent location we've had; so far, we've moved four times in two years." She glances at the tree-swinger, now constructing a fort out of dirt and twigs. "I was like that when I first came here," she says. "Now I'm really busy. I do a lot of arts and crafts, love to read plays, and am beginning a history project. You know, Hill is what you make of it. Would I ever go back to public school? Are you kidding?"

Bay School
1744 University Avenue, Berkeley
Telephone 845-7998
Enrollment: 30 students, age 13-19
Director: Dr. Glen Nimnicht

Head teacher Doug Hall's comment that Bay School offers "a smorgasbord of life" and another teacher's observation that the main aim of the school is to aid its students become "whole and sane human beings" both help describe the operation of Bay School.

In its first year, the school has attracted 30 students, a quarter of whom have specific learning disabilities and the majority of whom have psychological problems. In general, they are "turned off" to education and wary of regimentation and coercion of any kind.

Bay School was established to handle such students. In its brochure is a statement that the school will help the student to overcome his disability and, at the same time, "respond to his interests and abilities, providing ways for him to demonstrate that he can be successful."

In practice, the school does a lot of remedial work on a one-to-one basis, sponsors field trips to tide pools, parks, and other spots "to inject a big chunk of the real world" (Hall's words), and relies on a faculty which is exceptionally supportive, empathetic and non-authoritarian.

A new student begins by drifting into the school (held on two floors of a church annex) about an hour or so a week. In time, he comes more regularly, but might still not participate in classes. When he finally decides to become involved, he is not pressured to make a commitment. He may stick with a subject as long as he is interested, and no disapproval will be voiced when his interest flags.

According to a schedule posted in the lounge, the classes offered are strictly academic, with the exception of Eastern Thought and Yoga. However, several students commented that the schedule was largely for show, and when they wanted to study something "we just hunt up a teacher and ask him to hold a class." Teachers must tailor their classes to their students, realizing that homework and assignments of any sort will be resisted. Rather than academics, practical and artistic work holds most appeal for the students. The lower floor of the building offers activities such as electronics, printing presses, art, and woodworking, and students seem to spend more time there than in the upstairs classrooms. This preference does not worry the head teacher, who says that Bay School offers its students freedom to make choices from attractive alternatives.

Generous doses of freedom and love is the prescription Bay School has chosen for its students, and the teachers are ready to wait patiently until the mixture has its effect.

Berkeley School
2149 Blake Street, Berkeley
Telephone 843-7343
Enrollment: 23 students, age 12-14
Director: Eugene Bergman

Berkeley School embodies the philosophy of one man: its director. Bergman has well-defined views on the role of the teacher and the importance of instilling responsibility in students, and carries out these views in his school. Bergman's is a genial but authoritative personality; it is not surprising that several of his students address him as Mr. Bergman rather than Gene.

Instead of merely functioning as a resource person, the teacher should, according to Bergman, actively "pursue" the student, stimulating him to attend class or get involved in an individual project. This is done by making class activities involving, and by holding conferences to discover and capitalize on a student's interests. When all else fails, a student may be denied permission to leave school grounds. "Boredom," grinned Bergman, "often leads to education."

Students are encouraged to honor their commitments. If they choose to sign up for a course, they are expected to attend classes with some regularity, even though parts of the course may be less exciting than others. Conversely, "free riders" are discouraged. When a new course, Local History, was started, three students who had not signed up clamored in vain to be taken along on the first class meeting -- a field trip.

The course of studies, first adopted by the students during a two-week camping trip at the beginning of the school year and later modified, stresses basics like English, math, science and social studies. Students are expected to work in all areas of learning, although little pressure is exerted to accomplish this by any specific time. A great deal of programmed material is used, especially for students who are shy of failure in group situations. Periodic evaluation conferences, said Bergman, help students see where they stand and give "pangs of conscience to ones who are not producing.

The big problem faced by Berkeley School is lack of space. At present, classes are held in three small rooms (with kindergarten-size furniture) rented during the week from St. Mark's Church. Six blocks away from the church, a rented basement is being remodeled by students and staff into a combination storage/workshop, with space for pets, woodshop, crafts, and a student lounge. Outdoor play area is lacking, and students with permission to leave the school grounds spend their time on the Cal campus or in the Telegraph Avenue district.

Next year, Bergman hopes to move the school to a more spacious location, and also move up a grade each year until Berkeley School covers both junior high and high school.

Finegold Ranch School
Star Route 28, Fresno
Telephone (209) 822-2358 (messages only)
Enrollment: 34 students, age 5-18
Spokesman: Mrs. Susie Hickman

Finegold Ranch School lies in a lovely and isolated area. Framed by rolling dry hills, the school grounds are interwoven by paths leading through stands of trees, and watered by a nearby creek which forms pools and torrents. The isolation and beauty combine to form a separate world for the Finegold community. In this private world, children and adults work at discovering and treasuring their individual selves, and at being open and human with those about them.

Superficially, Finegold Ranch might be classed as a boarding school. Actually, the sense of community is so strong that the division between student and teacher vanishes. Everyone is both teacher and student, teaching what he knows and learning from others. This sense of community extends to the day-by-day details of school operation. Everyone pitches in to cook, to clean up, to make necessary repairs on the grounds.

Classes are scheduled, but not at a specified time. English, for example, takes place after breakfast. Whenever the lesson is over, students move on to the next subject. Tuesday is a free day, and people may read, write, talk, wander in the hills, or sleep.

The total group -- children and adults -- decides all policy matters, makes necessary rules, and discusses interpersonal and personal problems such as stealing and fighting. When one boy had tuition problems after his parents separated, the reaction was empathetic and swift: he would be permitted to stay in school without paying. Interpersonal relationships are important at Finegold; to improve them, a psychologist comes to the school at intervals to lead encounter groups and carry on sensitivity training.

Although a high school diploma is normally awarded, it is treated as an incidental by-product and learning is not devalued. Last year, all three persons who received a high school diploma went on to college.

People who believe in Finegold's philosophy are staunch in their support. Unlike most schools, Finegold depends on tuition to cover only about half of its expenses. The rest comes from private contributions and from the staff (or, more exactly, the adult members of the community). These dedicated persons not only receive no pay, but sometimes contribute food and money, in addition to their services, to the school.

Hearth-Shire
Shotwell and 23rd Street, San Francisco
Enrollment: 35 students, age 5-15
Spokesman: Elin Gensler
Telephone 431-6406

What kind of education for their children is wanted by parents who have turned their backs on the life-style and values of "straight" society? Hearth-Shire has some of the answers.

The school is viewed as an extension of the home -- and home, for about half of the children, means a commune. Like the home, the school has large numbers of caring adults and enough children around for playmates. It differs only in offering more facilities, such as books, art supplies and work area.

At present, Hearth-Shire occupies an old, rundown building, with concrete floors, little lighting and makeshift furniture. An adjacent dirt yard, with a sandpile in one corner, is available for outdoor play. Adults concede that they will probably not be able to remain in the building past June, since the Fire Department is pressing certain building code violations.

No tuition is charged. Most parents contribute time rather than money; a few pay enough to meet rent and other expenses. According to one of the parent-teachers, Hearth-Shire stresses education through interaction, and the role of the teacher is "to demonstrate something you really love."

In keeping with the emphasis on spontaneity, there is no daily schedule of classes. In fact, only one class meets regularly -- a reading class for younger children, proposed by one mother at the weekly parents' meeting and taught by her. This mother commented that she would like to see more academic classes, but the impression was that most parents do not agree, preferring learning to flow out of life.

One such learning experience occurred recently. Members of one commune became interested in puppet-making as a means of earning money. Puppet fever spread through Hearth-Shire and, by the time it subsided, nearly every child in the school had made puppets. Related activities involved sewing clothes for the puppets and writing plays for puppet shows.

Most of the parents who send their children to Hearth-Shire are interested less in academics and more in arts, crafts, music, politics, and such practical skills as cooking, sewing, and first-aid. One can understand why these parents choose Hearth-Shire over a public school, which would confront their children with a radically different set of values. Hearth-Shire echoes and reinforces the values taught in the children's homes.

Hedge School
P.O. Box 9125, Berkeley
Telephone 527-3450
Enrollment: 22 students, age 5-12
Director: Mrs. Alice Sederholm

Self-directed and self-motivated students is the aim of Hedge School, an ungraded school with no report cards, no tests, and almost total freedom of academic choice.

When visited, Hedge was holding its classes in the director's home (it has recently moved to the Northminster Presbyterian Church in El Cerrito), with students either playing outside or involved in activities in the large basement room.

The school's emphasis on interpersonal relationships was described by the director. She explained that students are helped to develop respect for themselves, for others, and for study materials. At one point during the visit, two children began fighting over a game. A teacher called them over, had each one explain his position, and then, without giving a judgement, watched as the two returned amicably to their game. Aggression may either be verbalized, as in the instance above, or acted out without injury to either party. "That's one device we use," said the director, pointing to a corner where two boys were whacking away at each other with large foam rubber swords.

In another part of the basement, a small group of students were rehearsing a play, with the teacher taking an observer's, rather than a supervisor's role. Other children were involved in games, cards or chess.

The school, the brochure states, relies heavily on manipulative and self-correcting didactic material (such as Montessori equipment) for teaching academic skills. A teacher explained that basic skills are taught either individually or in small groups. Teachers observe children's progress and help when they feel it is needed.

The school also attempts to present learning as a dynamic and unified affair. Students spend much time outdoors in good weather, exploring the parks and other natural resources.

Involvement in the community is stressed too. School field trips included a visit to the Berkeley courts and, during an election year, an investigation of different political parties was made -- both activities designed to lift learning out of the textbook and into life.

Martin Luther King Jr. In-Community School
2340 Durant Street, Berkeley (mailing address)
Telephone 848-1527
Enrollment: 30 students, age 12-18
Coordinators: Mrs. Toni Vincent, Ed Steinert

An ambitious program to tap the resources of the community for direct involvement in the classroom was the starting point of the MLK In-Community School. Founders hoped to bring such people as artists, politicians and businessmen to school, thus making education more relevant to their students. These students, according to the founders, would be mainly lower and middle-class alienated "drop out" youth. The statement of goals included a curriculum with 66 courses, many academic and others chosen for relevancy, especially to minority teenagers: Economic Survival in the Ghetto, Third World Writing, Prison as a Metaphor for Life.

In attempting to realize these goals, the school has encountered a major difficulty: finding a suitable location. Between October and January, the school moved three times, and now occupies a dilapidated house with only three small rooms available for classes. When all three rooms are occupied, other space must be found -- one girl was having an English lesson on the front steps of the house. This student complained that the physical limitations made it impossible to have such areas as a student lounge, arts and crafts workshop, or other meeting places to promote student esprit d'corps.

The present class schedule is an abbreviated one. One hour each of math and English class is offered in the morning on a regular basis; some elective courses are held in the afternoons. One student could think of only four electives: Gun Class, Black Studies, Photography and PE (in a nearby YMCA). Apparently the comprehensive curriculum envisioned by the founders has failed to materialize or to attract many students.

One of the teachers, who refused a request to sit in on a class, said that about 20 students (mostly black) are attending class, but others drift in from time to time. He added that no pressure is put on students to attend, although math and English are supposed to be taken by all students.

According to this teacher, finances are a problem for the school. Even though foundation grants cover more than half of the operating expenses, not enough tuition comes in to meet the rest of the costs. About half of the students are low-income and pay no tuition; some who can afford don't pay. When there is no money for teacher salaries, the faculty works on a volunteer basis.

Apparently the sought-for goals of the MLK In-Community School founders have been largely unachieved. With a permanent, suitable location, the school might, however, be able to attract a committed student body and thus realize the dream that inspired the school's founding.

McKinney School
2145 Bunker Hill Road, San Mateo
Telephone 345-7815
Enrollment: 12 students, age 5-14
Director: Mrs. Dianne McKinney

"Growth through cooperation" is the motto of McKinney School. Much careful planning preceeded the school's opening this fall. Not only were educational theories from key persons set up as guideposts, but practical methods for accomplishing these goals were worked out.

The result is a school where students are encouraged to be responsible and self-disciplined, and to view learning as an exciting part of life. A visitor is impressed by the high level of purposeful activity, and by the self-confidence exhibited by the students.

Instruction is individualized. Each student works with a teacher in setting up his own program for math, reading, science and writing. Whenever possible, academics are tied to the practical. A dead mole found during a walk in the woods may be dissected as part of a science lesson; math skills would be practiced by handling finances during a shopping expedition. In-school lessons are supplemented by field trips to such places as planetariums, beaches, theatres and museums. Even though McKinney School does not have the trained specialists available in a large school plant, individual attention has been effective in overcoming learning blocks. One girl, who did not learn to read in special remedial classes in public school, is reading now with the help of a teacher and a volunteer tutor.

The school is located in several rooms of a Sunday School building, and the woods surrounding the building are as much a part of the school as the classrooms. In addition, students are encouraged to view the whole world as their classroom. They attend local meetings to learn about government. Each student spends several hours a week participating in a community activity, such as helping in the library or working in a home for physically handicapped children. Student interest in current events has grown so high that many, on their own initiative, write letters to newspapers and public figures to express their concerns over various issues. The students' pride in describing their activities makes it clear that they view themselves as active and responsible citizens.

As its motto indicates, McKinney School places special emphasis on promoting respect and cooperation between people. Teachers help to foster these attitudes. On one occasion, when a visitor was chatting with the head teacher, several children began moving tables around. The teacher spoke to them as she would to an adult. Instead of berating them or asking them to be "nice", she simply pointed out that the noise was disturbing her and she'd appreciate it if they'd stop. They did. With such models, McKinney students are learning to respect the feelings and opinions of others.

Mujji Ubu
1 Lawson Road, Kensington
Telephone 526-8066 or 527-5837
Enrollment: 32 students, age 5-15
Founder and co-director: Beverley Andrae

"There's magic in the air," commented a visitor after a day at Mujji Ubu (the name comes from an American Indian word meaning "magic"). The school has kept the spontaneity which characterized its first stage: a summer day camp program at Tilden Park in 1968. Children were offered instruction in graphic arts, dance, hiking, nature lore, music and drama. Enthusiastic parents urged Beverley Andrae to add a few academic subjects and operate during the school year. She agreed.

School is held in (and around) classrooms rented from the First Unitarian Church, but it is not confined either physically or mentally to the area. Students and staff take weekly all-day field trips to cultural and natural resources of the Bay Area: museums, parks, zoos, tide-pools. On the school grounds, children with shovels and hoes work alongside their teachers and parents to create their own out-of-doors, or plan an outing.

Nothing is considered extra-curricular at Mujji Ubu. Emphasis is placed not on teaching, but on learning, and students are encouraged in their individual paths as new experiences are made available to them. Parents help in all phases of activity, both during and after school hours.

The school day begins with a meeting of all students, staff, parents who are around, and assorted animals. This gathering is a get-together, a time for announcements, and a grievance committee-of-the-whole to handle any problems which have arisen. After the meeting, the younger children gather for reading, the older ones for language arts. The schedule progresses -- science, math and other subjects, which the students join in voluntarily (or stay away from, as they please). Subjects like sex education are taught frankly, openly discussed, and rounded out with visits to the planned parenthood center and the VD clinic. Mujji Ubu students, in tune with the world around them and especially well-acquainted with Tilden Park, are well-versed in ecology. Even the younger ones know of Nature's balance, and how pollution and pesticides are affecting the environment.

The schedule, however rich it is, is secondary to student wishes. At one school meeting last March, students presented plans for a Wizard of Oz production, complete with scenery and costumes. For the next few months, the entire school, including parents, devoted itself to the production. Costumes were sewn, scenery hammered together, and the cast (average age 7) familiarized with the story.

Who knows what Mujji Ubu may be doing today? Children and magic know no time schedules in their growth.

New Community School
3265 Market Street, Oakland
Telephone 655-8443
Enrollment: 40 students, age 13-18
Director: Steve Fisher

An autonomous Black Studies program and a student body about half black are signs that New Community School is succeeding in its efforts to represent North Oakland's black community.

New Community's school day is a highly-structured one. Classes run from 8:15 a.m. to 3 p.m. and, while attendance is not compulsory, group pressure tends to insure that students do go to class regularly. If they do not, or if they cause disturbances, they may be referred to a Discipline Committee. All students are required to take English and Social Studies, and all black students are enrolled in Black Studies, which encompasses such topics as music, history, community involvement, poetry and drama.

The school was organized last summer and earned its $1,000 starting assets by a student and staff house-painting job.

New Community sees itself as more than an alternative to public school. "This is not a free school," commented one of the teachers, "because we have political aims -- we want to develop certain attitudes in our students and show them how to put these attitudes into practice." To do this, students and staff participated in such events as Safeway picketing and October 15 Moratorium activities. They also passed up Columbus Day in favor of a Nat Turner Day.

Identification with North Oakland -- and particularly black North Oakland -- is evident as soon as one enters the YMCA building where school is held. Signs point the way to classrooms: the Ray Charles Room, the Frederick Douglass Room, the Huey Newton Room. Teachers are pleased by the support black parents are giving to the school; they now make up a majority of the Board of Directors. Students are represented on the Board as well as on the Steering Committee, but their voice in school policy is a relatively minor one.

Not all students would accept a school with a full schedule of classes, regular assignments and homework. Realizing this, New Community founders have been careful in initial selection of students. A teacher explained that applicants were told bluntly that the school was designed for serious students. A boy who asked about a course in motorcycle riding was advised to go to a motorcycle school. This weeding-out has produced a group of students who are amenable to the discipline and academic work asked of them.

New Directions Community School
445-10th Street, Richmond
Telephone 233-0118
Enrollment: 36 students, age 11-18
Co-directors: Mike McConnell, Peter Ourusoff

Students, not parents, teachers or administrators, were the prime force in establishing New Directions Community School. The foundations were laid last summer, when a group of high school students, dissatisfied with public school, banded together with a sympathetic teacher and planned a school to conform to their ideas of what education should be.

"Since students started the school," states the New Directions brochure, "it was only natural that they should run it." In twice-weekly meetings, students decide such matters as new courses, finances (almost ¼ of the school's income comes from fund-raising), and any other matters affecting the operation of the school.

New Directions Community School is housed in a shabby former office building in downtown Richmond. Inside, the cold and lack of furniture is offset by student art-work on walls. All classroom doors sport neatly-lettered signs listing the days and hours of classes held inside, as well as names of students responsible for cleanup.

With students setting the curriculum, it's not surprising to find, in addition to academic courses, such classes as Community Organizing and New Politics, Encounter Group, and Modern Protest Novels. What is surprising is the enthusiasm for learning shown by students whom previous schools had labeled underachievers and "turned off". The average student voluntarily takes 25-30 class hours a week; some take as many as 52, including both solids and electives.

Many of the classes are taught by volunteers -- college students, professionals, and craftsmen from the community. Six of the New Directions students also act in a teacher role, passing on their skills in sports, music and film-making. "I'd like to see more of us teaching," commented one of the older boys. "You know, make this into a true learning community, where we can teach what we know and learn from others."

What kind of students choose to attend New Community? More than half are college-bound, according to one teacher. He explained that the written evaluations of student work in each class are on file and can be converted into grades if required by the college. He characterized students as possessing large amounts of ego, energy and creativy -- traits which often do not fit comfortably into the patterns of the public school system.

However satisfied with their new arrangements, the students have not turned their backs on former classmates remaining in the public schools. They are working with a small group of De Anza High School students to convince De Anza faculty and administrators to also take a few steps in a new direction.

Pacific Day School
40 Shell Road, Mill Valley
Telephone 388-2468
Enrollment: 30 students,age 3-10
Co-directors: Margaret Kelley, Jean Raible

Sixteen books of Blue Chip stamps (traded in for an electric saw and drill to make furniture and equipment) were the starting assets of Pacific Day School.

Six years after its founding, the school stresses human relationships first, academics second. Children are encouraged to operate on the free learner rule -- do what you want, when you want, as long as you don't hurt yourself or others. The fact that many of the children spend a great deal of time playing bothers the directors not at all. They believe that play is both necessary and a valuable learning experience.

A variety of activities takes place in the comfortably cluttered house, full of books, games, art supplies and music. A quick tour might disclose five girls twisting to a rock record, a boy feeding the school mouse, two girls working with pottery. In the living room, a teacher calls out "Anyone want to play number bingo?" Five children crowd around her, and they drop to the floor and begin an intense game. In a corner, a college student, volunteering her time, reads to two little ones. A group of older boys draws and chats companionably at a large work table. One is impressed with the purposeful activity and self-reliance of these children.

A co-director explained that all academic work was strictly on a voluntary basis, and that no regular classes were held (with the exception of music, which is taught twice a week by a visiting teacher). Most of the children, she said, learned to read by age 7 -- because they wanted to. She picked up from the table one of a small pile of hand-made workbooks. "Some of the children came up and wanted to learn some math," she said. "So now I'm making up workbooks for them to practice what they've learned. They usually go in spells; maybe after finishing a workbook, they won't come back to math for several weeks. The teachers, she added, also stay on the lookout for signs a child might be ready to learn, and would then suggest activities to spark his interest.

Some children do have trouble adjusting to the freedom and absence of schedule that characterize Pacific Day School. The teacher recalled one such girl, who thought that school meant neat rows of desks, discipline, and lessons. The newcomer organized a play school and interested several of the children in attending. After a week, the play school folded -- no one would come.

What is the philosophy of the Pacific Day School? One teacher brought over a copy of a speech by Felix Greene and pointed to a sentence: "The kind of education I'm interested in is the development of an individual free from fear, so he can be free to be himself and live his own authentic life to the fullest."

"That," she said, "is what we believe."

Pacific High School
P.O. Box 311, Palo Alto
Telephone (408) 867-2260
Enrollment: 72 students, age 14-18
Director: Mark Sheehan

Growth through freedom is the idea that animates the operation of Pacific High School. "The atmosphere of coercion, testing and judgement that pervades the public schools inhibits growth," said the director. "Even an average student can gain more in a year at Pacific that he would in three years of public school."

In keeping with its emphasis on freedom, student participation in class is entirely voluntary. There are no exams, no grades, and little if any assigned paper work. The director commented that the students do not like to write and that so far no way has been found to encourage them to do so. The non-authoritarian approach, he admitted, does interfere with planning. If he were to organize a workshop with outside speakers, or make arrangements for a field trip, he might then find that students would not participate.

From talking to students, one gathers that classes as such do not occupy much of their time. The average class meets two hours a week; the only class which meets daily is yoga. "People do what they want to," a student member of the Board of Trustees has written. "For many people that means doing very little at first, especially right after they come to the school from highly-regimented situations. If one is interested, however, the courses are exciting and not watered down." Pacific does offer preparation for taking college entrance examinations, and graduates have been accepted at various colleges. Geodesic dome building is a favored activity; 10 such domes have been built or are underway. A few are destined as dorms for some of the 40 students who board at the school.

The high school is located on a beautiful hilly countryside southwest of Saratoga, on land donated by parents. Students and staff worked together to construct the four wooden buildings, with balconies running around them, set at the bottom of a canyon overlooking a creek. Interiors are largely unfinished, with little furniture. The most attractive and orderly room is the yoga room, with its cushions, art work, and inspirational sayings. All of the housework, except cooking, is handled by the students.

The general impression of Pacific High is that of a small community -- pleasant, friendly, relaxed. People may be strolling around, working outside, talking, playing guitars, or sitting in the sun. One gets the impression that both students and staff have already selected their life style, and no expectation exists that students will explore or question their attitudes. The homogeneity of the group and the physical isolation of Pacific High School combine to create a little world of its own. As the student member of the Board of Trustees said, "It is easy to come up the hill every day and dissociate yourself from the rest of the world."

Pegasus
P.O. Box 657, Hayward
Telephone 582-1555
Enrollment: 40 students, age 5-18
Director: Dr. Frank Lindenfeld

"Our main purpose is to allow children to find themselves and to help them grow to their full potential as human beings by providing them with an environment of acceptance, love and freedom."

This statement from the brochure of Summerhill West, Los Angeles also applies to Pegasus, which opened this year and is run by Summerhill West's former director. Students spend their days on a three-acre lot, with main building and several outbuildings -- former kennels being converted to offices, some dorms, classrooms, art workshops and children's clubhouses.

Classes are not a key word at Pegasus. Most of the intermediate boys (about age 9) spend their time out-of-doors; the intermediate girls busy themselves with arts and crafts. The teenagers, who comprise about half of the total enrollment, have a schedule of classes offered, but attendance is voluntary and interest sporadic. Classes which arouse most enthusiasm are the "human relations" ones such as encounter groups.

One day, an observer witnessed a mock invasion of The Puss (intermediate girls' clubhouse) by intermediate boys from Fort Lazy. Later, the boys went off with a teacher to visit a nature center, and the girls retired for a session in the art workshop. The high-school-age students were scattered around the grounds. Some sprawled in the living room, talking and strumming guitars. Newspaper clippings about Biafra and Berkeley were pinned up on a bulletin board, but two of the boys said they hardly ever read newspapers and weren't much interested in current events. A few older boys were busy remodeling an outbuilding, one boy worked on his geodesic dome, another composed a song. A scheduled current events discussion attracted about six students.

This lack of academic activity, when pointed out to the director, evoked a ready answer: "Lessons aren't the only -- or even necessarily the best -- way to learn." It is the school's philosophy that children have a natural curiousity about the world around them. Given time and freedom, they will eventually find and follow their own interests. The role of the teacher, Lindenfeld added, is largely that of a resource person, and students feel free to seek out older students or teachers (there are 15 full-time teachers at Pegasus) when they want to learn something. Most academic subjects, according to the director, are taught on a one-to-one basis, and learned without difficulty when the child is ready. Many of the students demonstrate the "Summerhill reaction" -- when put in a voluntary situation, they stay away from classes and academic activity for a length of time proportionate to their hatred for their previous school. No pressure is exerted; the director estimates that the school needs a year or two to change a student.

Lindenfeld sees his main role as a buffer between the students and their parents -- and between the students and a society which, he feels, badly needs changing.

Peninsula School
Peninsula Way, Menlo Park
Telephone 323-5424
Enrollment: 225 students, age 3-14
Director: Barney Young

In 1925, a group of liberal parents removed their children from public school and began their own school, pitching in to handle teaching and administrative duties. Today, Peninsula School has grown to a firmly-established institution, stretching over 8 acres. Clusters of classrooms and cottages surround the main building, a pale green Victorian mansion housing offices, library, and such special areas as art and weaving workshops and a room full of math games.

Despite the size of the school (which has made school-wide meetings infrequent), students still have a voice in policy. One example is the case of the dogs. At one time, packs of dogs roamed the grounds, terrorizing the younger children. The administration passed a "no dogs" rule. Incensed, students picketed the director's office and then sent in delegates for a meeting which hammered out a compromise: each class would decide which dog (or dogs) they would be responsible for; the rest would be banned.

The school is divided between structured and non-structured activity. Each child is assigned a classroom and expected to be in it for instructional periods, but exceptions are readily granted. If a student chooses to read or do math during a science session, no objection would be made. Each day, students are given one or more hours of free choice, during which they may play outdoors, visit one of the special interest rooms, or simply rest.

One teacher of a mixed primary class explained her system of assignments. Each weekend, she takes home all of the students' binders and returns them Monday morning, with suggestions for the coming week's work. Every student has his individual set of suggestions, which may be changed after consultation with the teacher. "I try to give them as much leeway as I can for their own projects," she said. "What I do is fill in any holes."

In his office (which had a "Dogs have a right" picket sign leaning against a wall), the director discussed some of the ideas governing Peninsula's operation. "Children need to experience adults in all relationships: leader, friend and playmate," he said. "All our teachers are both responsible and responsive -- they try to understand the children and then meet their needs. It's an active, not a passive role."

The place of the arts is an important one at Peninsula. "Language isn't the only way of communicating," Young pointed out. "In fact, it may be one of the hardest. In our studios, children can communicate through art, dance or music and be successful. And," he added emphatically, "it's important for all children to feel themselves successes."

Pinel
3655 Reliez Valley Road, Martinez
Telephone 228-6853
Enrollment: 70 students, age 5-14
Directors: Ray Amir, Carl Dorman, Bill Kenney, Jim Stein

"Children want to learn, and if a child does not want to learn, something has gone wrong." This basic belief has animated Pinel since it was established in 1962 by four public school teachers. The founders, who still run the school, determined to offer their students a wide range of experience, and encourage each student to explore possibilities and find his own direction.

This experiment in free learning takes place in a six-acre area of sloping grassy hills. Children spend much of their time out-of-doors, exploring the hills, wading in the creek, feeding the animals, riding the pony, and otherwise doing as they choose. Their unrestricted activity mirrors the Pinel philosophy that play is essential to health and the development of intellectual and creative abilities.

Depending on the subject, lessons take place either outdoors or in one of the five simple, functional buildings. Most academic work (especially in the basics of reading and math) is done on a tutorial basis. Teachers call in a student when they feel it is time for a lesson. Although pressure is put on students to learn basic skills, a determined Pinel student can resist this pressure.

In addition to academics, a variety of subjects is offered, including sensitivity training, camping, farming and animal husbandry, palmistry and astrology. Field trips are a preferred method of experiencing (rather than reading about) aspects of life. Recently, a group of the older students took off to spend a week at a New Mexico Indian reservation.

School opens any time between 9:15 and 10:15 a.m., depending on when staff and students (one of whom bikes 14 miles to school) arrive. When the children come, many of them busy themselves in projects without having to wait for staff direction.

This de-emphasis of teacher leadership indicates that the type of child who would do best in the Pinel atmosphere is a self-directed one; children who feel the need for a great deal of structure and supervision would be isolated and unhappy.

Pinel's founders feel that their school is a genuine alternative in education. In a brochure, they state "Its very existence, the interest, curiousity, enthusiasm and antagonism it has engendered simply by being here is our contribution to educational change."

Presidio Hill School
3839 Washington Street, San Francisco
Telephone 751-9318
Enrollment: 147 students, age 4½-15
Director: Bob Muller

The oldest-established school in this survey, Presidio Hill has pledged itself since 1918 to the "development and appreciation of individuality." These goals are achieved, according to the brochure, through emphasis on "initiative, cooperation and responsibility offering reasonable choice within a reasonable structure." The large number of scholarships offered (2 full, 20 partial) reflects Presidio Hill's determination to have its student body represent all political, economic and racial elements of the community. Two years ago, the school added a junior high program to its elementary school.

Unlike the true "free school", Presidio Hill is built around a system of class instruction; on an average day, almost all the children will be in class rather than engaged in free play. Various grades are combined (K-1, 2-3, 4-5-6) into in a class. The school's insistence on meeting the student's individual needs explains the lack of basic readers, workbooks and standardized tests.

Teachers devote much of their time to work with individual students, working with them on assignments and projects. Students are encouraged to plan their own activities and, together with the faculty, they project class activities and functions involving the entire school.

The director participates in class activity, rather than remaining in a purely administrative capacity, as might be expected in such a large school. For example, he writes down and types up the dictated stories of the younger children. His casual manner sets the tone for teacher-student interaction at the school; a visitor observes that the atmosphere at Presidio Hill is a creative, informal one, well suited for learning.

The newest Presidio Hill program, for junior high school students, is a two-year non-graded program of study and travel, built around a core subject for each of the two years. In the first two years, core topics were Mexico and the southwest, and government. Throughout the year, students were given both practical and theoretical exposure to the subject. In connection with the government unit, students visited 2 weeks in Sacramento, 6 in Washington D.C. In the year devoted to Mexico, they spent more than a month in that country. As much as possible, other subjects taught (language arts, science) are tied in to the core topic.

One important part of Presidio Hill's credo is close integration of the students' home and school experiences. This belief is actually built into the structure of the school; all parents and faculty are members of a corporation that determines school policy. As the brochure states, "All are committed in the interests of the children and by contract to share in the democratic conduct of its (corporation's) affairs."

The Shasta School
35 Ridge Lane, Mill Valley (director's address)
Telephone 388-1674
Enrollment: 60 students, age 13-19
Director: Mrs. Donna Pervier

Shasta is not one school, but a number of separate tutorial units scattered around Marin County and San Francisco. Each unit (called a school) has a paid teacher as director, a group of volunteer assistants, and about 10 students. The schools meet in teacher homes or other available facilities. Schools cover different subject areas, the main ones being academics, arts and crafts, and survival (outdoor living, camping skills and the like). This unit arrangement, suggested by the students, makes it possible to add a new school at any time and place that it is needed.

The complete student body meets once every two weeks. Students may change schools monthly, so that a student might study academic skills for one month and then opt for arts and crafts the next. Some group activities, such as field trips and hikes, may include more than one school.

A representative academic school, taught by a math teacher, offers classes in literature, creative writing, history and drama; the teacher also gives individual help with math. A visitor to this school sat in on a class (teacher and two students) reading aloud and discussing Ken Kesey's <u>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</u>. From casual conversation among the students, one gathered that they were excited about a project to make dandelion wine, a recent hike to Mt. Tamalpais, and a proposed visit to The Committee in connection with a drama class.

Shasta students who want to go to college can get help in preparing for examinations, the teacher explained. However, since most of the students are now sophomores, college entrance has not been a serious consideration so far.

Shasta is very freely organized; students and teachers have almost unlimited opportunity to select and experiment. This freedom lays on the student the responsibility to attend class and do his work, since no pressure from the staff is used. Some students take advantage of this freedom; others thrive on it. One girl in a history class, for example, decided on her own to write a term paper.

Shasta's organization does have some problems, the most obvious being very small classes which allow for little variety of perspective ("How much can you do in drama with only four kids?" one girl lamented). The scattered student body also makes it difficult to develop a community spirit. But the idea behind Shasta is a daring and ingenious one and the advantages are apparent: low tuition (thanks to volunteer teacher aides and rent-free locations), ease of expansion, and flexibility of school sites. In all, this unique approach to education has great potential which far outweighs its built-in problems.

The Shire School
239 Sadowa Street, San Francisco
Enrollment: 65 students, age 5-13
Spokesman: Helen Garvy
Telephone 863-2770

A great sense of community permeates Shire School. It seems less a school than a home -- a home with books and games scattered around the living room, a sign in the kitchen saying "Wash your own stuff", and an assumption that the entire family (students and staff) will pitch in during cleanup time.

Parents are deeply involved in Shire also. They pay no tuition, but are expected to participate in cleanup detail and to donate either time or money on a regular basis. Most of the money goes for supplies and rent (teachers receive no pay). For the first time in its existence, Shire has a real home -- a white wooden house, equipped with workshop areas for art, weaving, pottery, woodworking, several small rooms, and a large outside area in which an organic garden is being planted. Before buying this house, Shire was constantly on the move -- a total of 10 locations in two years.

The most difficult job at Shire is the teacher's. Some of them have specific skills to contribute; many are just there, willing, as the brochure says, "to try almost anything that a kid wants to do." Without the structure of a class schedule, teachers (few of whom have college degrees) must rely on their own ability to stimulate sutdent participation in learning activities. Their theory "If we do interesting things, kids will want to join in" seems to work particularly well in the areas of arts, crafts, and practical skills.

Only one class, yoga, meets on a regular basis. The rest of the time, the brochure says, "Kids gravitate to activities, parts of the building, teachers or other kids that they like." Field trips, both planned and spontaneous, happen often. Groups may visit a library, the zoo, the city dump, or just explore the city. Teachers (and apparently parents) are undisturbed if children do little or no academic work, although most children do pick up reading and math. Almost all academic skills are taught on an individual basis, usually at the student's request. "I don't feel it's so important for a kid to learn any particular subject," a teacher commented. "What <u>is</u> important is that he gains the self-confidence that he is able to master any subject he wants to."

Self-confidence, along with friendliness and independence, is a key characteristic of Shire students. About half of the children live in communes and fit in easily to the easy-going group life at school. Others have problems. One girl remarked that she had left Shire and gone to public school on two separate occasions, because she was disgusted at not learning anything. "But now," she added with a grin, "I know what Shire is about and I'm learning everything." About what? "Life."

The Urban School of San Francisco
2938 Washington Street, San Francisco
Telephone 922-5552
Enrollment: 90 students, age 14-18
Headmaster: Bob D. Wilder

Urban stands mid-way between the traditional and the free school. In many respects, it resembles a superior private school, with above-average students, small classes, and academic subjects. However, the school has earnestly tried to incorporate new ideas and attitudes and has succeeded to a large extent. To be admitted, a student must convince the director that he wants to do independent work; he is then given a great deal of leeway to permit him to accomplish this.

In principle, classes are compulsory, but exceptions can be arranged. Students may suggest and plan new courses. However, their enthusiasm often wanes and projects may be abandoned after a short time. So far, the school has offered no opposition to this, preferring unfinished work to the possibility of quenching student spontaneity.

Although Urban does assign work and give tests (for subject mastery, the brochure states), written progress reports rather than grades are sent to parents and students. In order to help meet college requirements, letter grades open only to faculty are kept on file. Although there is staff disagreement over this two-faced policy, it has been deemed the best way to help students get accepted to college while still working toward the aim of "replacing a grade-oriented community with a goal-oriented community."

This meticulous way of solving a problem is typical of the planning that went into Urban. The school developed from ideas collected in visits to schools and educators across the country. The founders of the school were a group of well-to-do San Francisco parents, who helped raise a total of $250,000 "seed money". The school still receives almost 40% of its income from private contributions.

Urban is located in the Pacific Heights area, a few blocks from a park which is used for outdoors classes. One of the problems faced by the school is community relations; some of the residents in the area were alarmed by the very informal hair and dress styles affected by the students. Last year, Urban put on a steet fair for its neighbors, and, the director said, relations have been more cordial since that time.

The most interesting part of the curriculum is the students' involvement with the city. This year, there will be a project month, in which students will work in various city offices (recreation, professional, political) instead of attending classes. Eventually, the school hopes to have students spend one-third of their time in some urban study, making the school truly live up to its name.

Walden Center School
2446 McKinley Avenue, Berkeley
Telephone 841-7248
Enrollment: 92 students, age 5-11
Director of Walden Foundation: Denny Wilcher

Walden was begun by parents who felt their children needed a place to grow naturally, free from regimentation and moving at their own speed. The school's operation reflects these aims.

Although children are assigned to a particular classroom (there are four groups -- kindergarten, lower, middle and upper), they spend little time in their class and only a part of that doing what might be called "lessons". On one nice day, more than half of the children were outside. They ran around the play area enclosed by classroom buildings, climbed, and got deeply involved in a structure made out of discarded lumber and iron pipes, which had been, at different times, a store, a stockade, and a jail.

One group of younger children was in the dance studio for a session in body movement; others were working under minimal adult supervision in the pottery and art studio. Children wandered in and out of classrooms, special interest rooms such as art and music, and the always-open teachers' office.

In each classroom, a teacher might be working with from one to three students, while the rest lounged about reading, talking, playing cards and amusing themselves. Each class holds a morning meeting to take attendance and make any special announcements. After one such meeting in the middle group classroom, one of the teachers called six students over for a reading lesson, while the second teacher just sat in his chair. Thirty minutes later, he had been approached by three boys and was deep into a map skills lesson that lasted 1½ hours.

Academic progress is not a matter of intense concern. Teachers are unruffled if a child shows little interest in learning in the first and second grades. If, however, a student is not reading by the fourth grade, the teacher will encourage him to do so. One teacher commented that Walden students are not tested until they finish sixth grade, at which time they score higher than public school students.

"We don't see our job as stimulating the kids to learn," said one teacher. "We're mostly friends, and the kids know that we're there whenever they want us, whether they want a lesson or just an understanding listener."

Acceptance to Walden is determined by the individual teacher, who visits the home, talks to child and parents, and may talk to former public school teachers before making his decision. A teacher emphasized that a child must be emotionally stable to cope with and benefit from the large amount of freedom he is given, as the school tries to keep its students happy and learning fun.

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STATISTICAL DATA FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Name of School	Begun	Day or Brdng	Pupils Ages	Pupils Number	Teachers full-time	Teachers part-time hrs/week	Teachers pay*	Fees**	Grants# full	Grants# part	Openings	Income %	Income Source	Starting Assets
Bay School	1969	Day	13-19	30	5	20	L	1500	8	2	10	100	Tuition	2 tuitions paid in advance
Berkeley School	1968	Day	12-14	23	2	12	S	800	-	-	15	99 1	Tuition Contributions	used home for class
Finegold Ranch School	1966	Brdng	5-18	34	9[a]		L[b]	215 mo.	9	7	waiting list	60 40	Tuition Contributions	
Hearth-shire	1968	Day	5-12	35	30[c]		none	none[d]	-	-	5	100	Contributions	
Hedge School	1967	Day	5-12	22	3	18	S[e]	750	1	2	8	100	Tuition[n]	$1000 loan and donated space
MLK Jr. In-Community School	1968	Day	12-18	30	6	15-20	L	open[f]	-	-	20	30 70	Tuition Other[o]	donated space
McKinney School	1969	Day	5-14	12	1	25	L	1000	-	-	25	100	Tuition	$250
Nuiji Ubu	1967	Day	5-15	32	4	35	S	720	7	4	8	100	Tuition	donated space
New Community School	1969	Day	13-18	40	3	50	L	open[f]	-	-	5	95 5	Tuition Contributions	$1000 and donated space
New Directions Community School	1969	Day	11-18	36	3	75	L	50 mo.	-	2	waiting list	75 25	Tuition Contributions	$200
Pacific Day School	1963	Day	3-10	30	3	36	L	950[g]	-	-	5	95 5	Tuition Contributions	16 Blue Chip books
Pacific High School	1961	Both	14-18	72	10		L	1500[h]	15	-	none	100	Tuition	donated space
Pegasus	1969	Both	5-18	40	15[i]	12	L	1050[j]	-	-	5	90 10	Tuition Contributions	$800
Peninsula School	1925	Day	3-14	225	16	60	M	1040[k]	4	50	waiting list	100	Tuition	donated space
Pinel	1962	Day	5-14	70	5	20-25	S	800	3	-	none	90 10	Tuition round. Grant	
Presidio Hill	1918	Day	4½-15	147	12	60	S	1000[l]	2	20	waiting list	95 5	Tuition Contributions	donated space
The Shasta School	1969	Day	13-19	60	10	300	L	40 mo.	-	-	open	100	Tuition	
The Swiss School	1967	Day	5-13	65	8	120	none	none[d]	-	-	waiting list	100	Contributions	
The Urban School of San Francisco	1966	Day	14-18	90	9	200	M	1800	-	27	waiting list	615 385	Tuition Contributions	$250,000 and donated space
Walden Center School	1958	Day	5-11	92	6	25	S	750[m]	-	-	waiting list	95 5	Tuition Contributions	

* Pay is comparable to the traditional private school. The key: L--substantially less
S--substantially equal
M--substantially more

** In many schools, discounts are given for tuition paid in advance and for 2 or more siblings attending the school. These are not included in the fees column, nor are miscellaneous costs such as registration.

\# Many of these grants simply mean the school absorbs part or all of unpaid tuition costs; in others, there is a special scholarship fund.

a There are nine persons over 18 living at the school.

b Room and board is provided in lieu of salary.

c Few of the parents work full-time, but it was impossible to determine the total number of part-time teaching hours per week.

d No tuition is charged. Parents contribute what they can, either in time or money (hopefully on a regular basis).

e One of the teachers is paid. Two volunteer their time.

f Parents pay what they can afford. Many of them pay little or nothing.

g Tuition for the 3-6 age group is $600.

h An additional $1350 is charged boarding students.

i Seven of these are college students who donate their time.

j Total fee for boarding students is $1300.

k Half-day students (nursery and kindergarten) are charged $575.

l Charge for the junior high program, including travel, is $1400.

m Kindergarten fee is $700. In addition to cash, which supplies about 70% of the fee, parents contribute 30% (about 50 hours) in work hours, or an extra $100-125.

n Plus donated scholarships.

o Foundation and church grants -- 62%; contributions -- 8%.

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EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Despite the interest in private experimental schools, no more than a small percentage of the nation's teachers actually work in such schools. What then are the alternatives available to the public school teacher in his quest for educational reform?

One possible answer is the experimental program within the public school system. Such programs are generally funded completely by the school district, although government may contribute through such means as the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act).

Berkeley, which has a reputation as an innovative and imaginative school district, is "home base" for the two programs described in the following section of the survey.

Berkeley Community High School and the Mini-school at Lincoln Community School perform a dual role: helping the students inside the program, and acting as a model and stimulus to their parent schools.

Berkeley Community High School
2246 Milvia Street, Berkeley
Telephone 841-1422, Extension 463
Director: Jay Manley

Eloquent phrases have been used to describe Community High School. "A significant effort to improve not just the quality but the basic nature of education." "A laboratory for the study of the problems of modern man's existence and well-being." But the comment of one student goes straight to the heart of what this experimental program is trying to do. "Now I feel that I'm really working for myself," he said. "Not for grades--for myself, because I want to."

This adventure in self-directed learning involves 6 full-time and 8 part-time teachers, together with 250 sophomore and junior students chosen to reflect the ethnic origin and academic achievement of the Berkeley High School population.

Community High meets from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and offers courses in the general areas of English, history, PE, art and drama. (Math and science may be taken before school at Berkeley High School.) All students must take courses in the first three areas, but requirements can be fulfilled by such courses as Social Change, Utopias, and Ethnic Dance. Most classes meet twice a week, two hours a day; Wednesday is a student-planned day, with special activities set up on a week-by-week basis.

Students participate in all decisions, except where policy is laid down by the parent school. The curriculum, including 33 different courses, was developed by staff and students during the first two weeks of school, and is subject to change at any time. Students are free to sit in on daily staff planning sessions, and an all-community meeting may be called at any time to discuss a matter of general interest.

A significant part of teacher time is taken up in conferences helping students to make the step from other-directed to self-directed learning. The success of these efforts was seen in a survey by the University of California, which rated the students high on independence of judgement, and also noted excellent progress in academic areas.

The success of Community High has, ironically, contributed to its problems. Students worry that the school (expanded this year to include juniors) is becoming too large to retain its sense of community. Berkeley High, which accredits Community, looks askance at some of the courses which students find exciting and relevant.

But the program continues to generate enthusiasm. There is a long waiting list of both faculty and students eager to join Community. One teacher declared that working a year at Community has "revitalized" here feelings about teaching. And the students are seriously concerned with the process of their education and are accepting a good deal of personal responsibility for it.

Mini-school
Lincoln Community School
1731 Prince Street, Berkeley
Telephone 845-5540
Spokesman: Chris Franklin

In the midst of a traditional elementary school, 200 students in grades 4 through 6 are getting a taste of the freedom which is a motif in most experimental schools. Students not only help choose special courses for their Mini-school, but also participate with parents and teachers in the advisory board and play a major part in evaluating the success of the program.

The Mini-school was begun in September 1969 with two goals:
1) to boost academic achievement, especially in the basic areas of reading and math.
2) to improve the students' image of themselves and of school.
Success in meeting these goals will be measured by academic and psychological tests.

One of the most significant facts about Mini-school is the way it has listened and responded to student wishes. The present group of special interest classes (meeting for 1½ hours every morning and including such subjects as electricity and community study) is the third offered in Mini-school. The two previous groups were each followed by a week of evaluation, and then amended to conform to student preferences. All indications are that the program is attuned to the students it serves and is not afraid of change.

The idea behind the special interest classes, according to Mini-school spokesman Chris Franklin, is to weave in relevant basic skills, and also to "turn on" the students enough to carry them through the rest of the day, which is traditional in nature. The seven Mini-school teachers also make use of teacher aides and volunteer tutors for one-to-one remedial work.

Although Mini-school parents at first worried that their children would lag in basic learning skills, Franklin said that parent support is now strong. The rapport has been achieved by parent seminars at the beginning of the school year, a parent advisory board, and teacher efforts to communicate the philosophy and operation of Mini-school.

The Mini-school teachers spend much time working together (planning sessions and weekly sensitivity training meetings), with their students, and with parents. Less time is devoted to communication with other Lincoln faculty members, and conflict has arisen. One time, when Mini-school students were allowed to call teachers by first names, the reaction was so heated that the principal stepped in to prohibit the innovation.

Less revolutionary ideas have, however, taken root and been allowed to flourish. After one special interest class published a newspaper, three classrooms in the regular school began their own individual publications, two of which are still being published. "Other kids will watch Mini-school try something," Franklin said, "and ask 'if they can do it, why can't we?'" And he smiled as he said it.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Finally, what can be done with the regular program in the public school?

The answer, given an enlightened administration and a supportive community, is "quite a good deal."

Although this survey was able to cover only a small number of public schools, the two described in the following pages indicate how effective a good public school can be.

Aragon High School in San Mateo has taken flexible scheduling as a base for increasing student options in a number of small but significant ways.

Old Mill School in Mill Valley is committed to a philosophy of the independent student, and puts this philosophy into practice with methods which would not be out-of-place at some of the more progressive private schools.

Perhaps the massive edifice of public education is not an easy one to reshape, but these two schools bear witness that a beginning can be made.

Aragon High School
900 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo
Telephone 344-1194
Principal: Kenneth Allen

Flexible scheduling, a widely-heralded "new technique" in education, is in its second year at Aragon High School. Its effect is to increase student enthusiasm for school by allowing a great deal more freedom than the traditional high school, while still retaining academic standards for a largely college preparatory student population.

By its very nature, flexible scheduling relieves some of the rigidity of compulsory education. Each student has a computer-generated schedule, with a different program for each day of the week. Since classes meet for varying lengths of time (one course is offered one day a week for 36 minutes), as many as 9 classes can be scheduled instead of the standard 6 or 7. Best of all, a large amount of unscheduled free time makes it possible for students to pursue individual interests -- they may work on a project, study, confer with teachers, talk with friends, or just daydream.

To encourage constructive use of this free time, the school has well-equipped resource centers, with nearby faculty offices. Students are also permitted to audit classes. And, in addition, they may take on the roles of teachers in one of Aragon's most interesting programs -- student tutoring. More than 200 tutors are in this program, which is aimed at incoming freshmen. Each 9th grader is assigned from one to three tutorials in English, social studies, or a language. Tutors work on a one-to-one basis or with a small group of freshmen, and receive either credit or letters of recommendation for their work.

Small freedoms mean a great deal to the students. One girl proudly commented on the "free choice" PE classes, in which she could choose from a long list of possibilities each week. On further questioning, she explained that 12 units of PE were programmed and only 3 elective, but it was the small bit of free choice that was remembered and appreciated.

The physical layout of Aragon High School -- one-story buildings laid out patio-style around a grassy square -- underlines the sensation of relaxation and openness.

But freedom is not without its problems. The principal said that attendance was a major headache, affecting mainly the students with poor motivation and low achievement who have the greatest trouble handling the individual responsibility involved in flexible scheduling. However, he added, a large percentage of Aragon's students and their parents support flexible scheduling in its attempt to further self-directed learning.

Old Mill School
352 Throckmorton Avenue, Mill Valley
Telephone 388-1868
Principal: David Erskine

A principal's office with the sign "Information, predictions and advice cheerfully given"...Children's paintings displayed in handsome wooden frames...A classroom containing a large Indian teepee, easy chairs and a comfortable sofa...

All these rapid first impressions inform the visitor that Old Mill is far from the average elementary school. Further investigation confirms that Old Mill School has taken giant strides in the direction of turning out independent students who view learning as an integral part of life.

Since the principal was appointed in 1967, he has abolished letter grades for the entire school, instituted many multi-grade classrooms, and encouraged teachers to experiment in the area of free learning. The result, he says, is happier students, happier teachers, and standardized test scores which have gone in one direction -- up.

Learning Lab #9, a large room housing students in grades 4 through 7, lives up to its name. At first glance, nothing seems to be happening. But a closer look shows a room vibrant with life -- and learning. Three girls are chatting and drawing mazes at the Writing Center; in an adjacent weaving room, a boy works on a giant yarn mural; sprawled on the floor is a boy filling out an arithmetic workbook. The teacher is in conference with a student, discussing a just-finished contract.

"Contracts" are the key word in Learning Lab #9, taking the place of formal lessons and group assignments. Each student has a contract, proposed by him and agreed upon by the teacher, listing the amount of work he intends to do in the areas of math, spelling, reading, writing, and handwriting. Contracts may run for 1,2, or 3 weeks (short-term) or for an indefinite period of time (long-term), and are followed by an evaluation session. Large chunks of the class day are designated as "work periods", during which contract assignments may be fulfilled; free time is also available for such options as reading, art work, talking with friends or taking a nap.

In addition to contract work in basic skills, students may choose from a large number of enrichment classes, with titles like electronics, problem solving, law, and Hobbits.

Although not all classes in Old Mill use the contract system, the principle of the independent learner is a pervasive one. With this principle goes an underlying respect for the individuality of the child. The combination develops, in the words of one teacher, "the most psychically healthy kids I know."